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Memoirs

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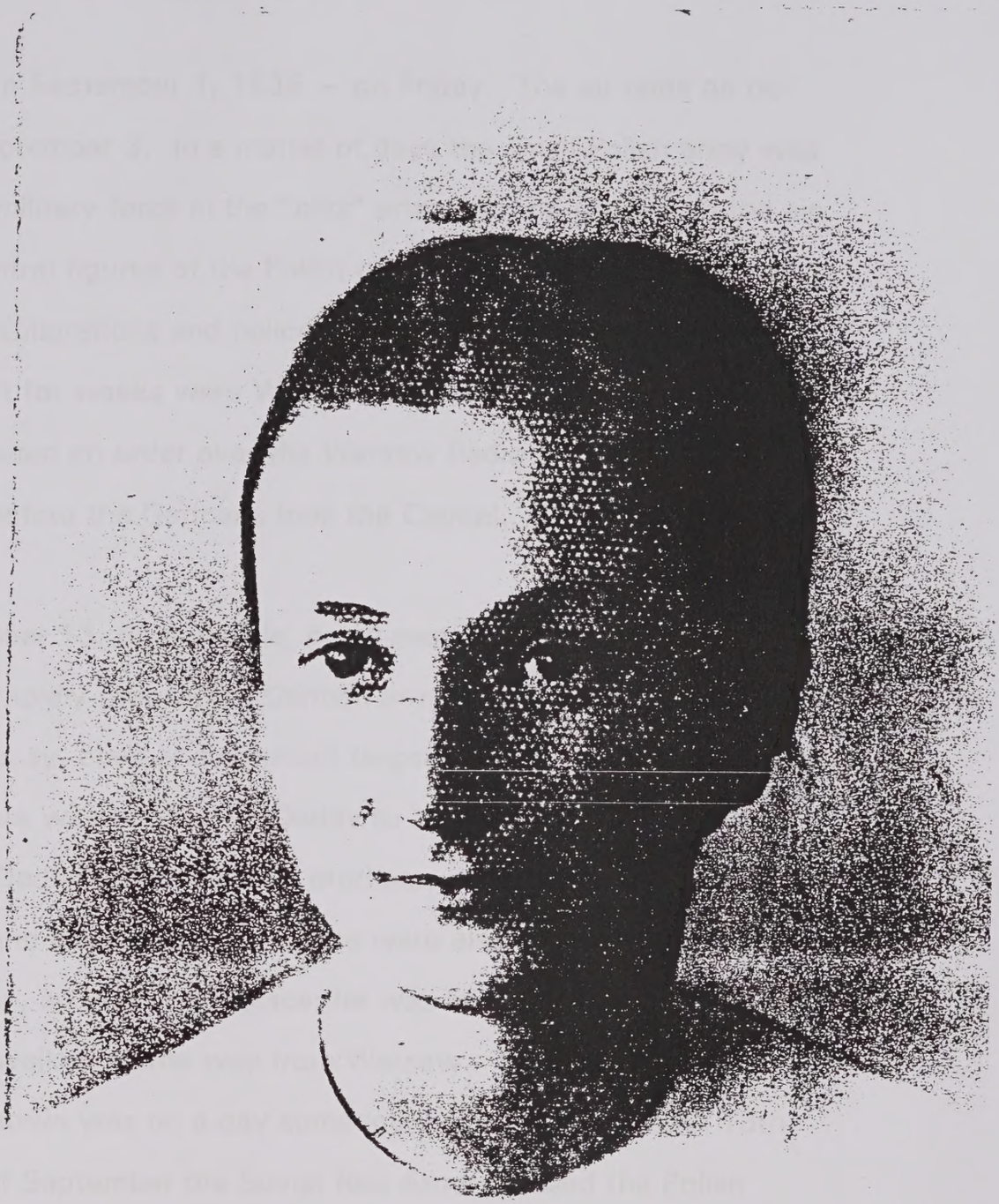


CHAPTER I

The war started on September 1, 1939 — on Friday. The air raids on our town began Sunday, September 3. In a matter of days the small Polish army was overrun by the German military force in the "blitz" attack on the ground, in the air, and on the sea. The central figures of the Polish government took refuge abroad. The local, municipal administrations and police were dissolving. The only two places known to hold out for weeks were Warsaw and Gdansk. Soon, however, the mayor of Warsaw issued an order over the Warsaw Radio for all the young men (civilians) to leave before the Germans took the Capital. Youth in other cities and towns did the same.

Daddy left September 13, on a bicycle, going east, where everyone was going — away from the rapidly proceeding German army. The roads were packed and very dangerous, an easy, open and constant target for the German bombs and even machine guns. There was no way for Daddy to let us know about himself.

In town remained Daddy's parents, two brothers, a sister and her husband, a grandmother, cousins and other relatives. There were also relatives in Warsaw. Szaya Trunk, Irka's cousin, arrived at our place; he was shoeless, his bleeding feet wrapped in rags, having walked all the way from Warsaw. The last and the heaviest bombing of our town was on a day sometime between September 13th and 17th. On the 17th of September the Soviet Red Army crossed the Polish border and a few days later entered our town and immediately set up a new administration.

Heniek, Irka's husband at that time, and his younger brother Adek (Irka's sister's husband-to-be) came to us on bicycles from Warsaw. Warsaw was still under siege. Our town was quiet now. People who remained in town, while many of them did not wish for the Red Army and the Soviet regime to stay on here

permanently, as a whole were very grateful to them for keeping the Germans and their bombings out and for the present relative safety and some order.

All this didn't last long, however. It became known that the details of the pact between the Germans and the Russians — the pact which allowed the Russians to cross the Polish border on the 17th of September — were now completed. The pact in its present form called for a demarcation line between their two armies to be Bug, the river on the west side of the city Bvseze (Brest) — quite a distance to the east of our town. The Soviets were to leave and the Germans were to occupy our town.

Heniek and Adek left for Brest at once on their bicycles. Szaya Trunk was planning to try to go back to Warsaw as soon as possible to get his wife still there and to leave together with her. Zeida didn't hesitate either — we must leave immediately. There was no transportation. The next day on the first rumor that a train will be made available for people wanting to evacuate, Baba, Zeida and I, carrying very little with us, marched at dawn to the train station. This was a false rumor. Civilian militiamen came and told everybody to go home and wait. We used the time for getting prepared a little better. Zeida learned that Daddy's sister Rachela who came here from Brest where she lived with her husband, to see her parents, was now going back to Breast. Daddy's father, whom Zeida knew well for many years dating back to his youth, said that there may be a place on the peasant's wagon, which he managed to rent, for some of our things. Daddy's father planned to accompany Rachela on the trip to Brest, then somehow come back.

So, we stuffed two long, big sacks with three pillows, three quilts, a little of bed linen and towels, some of our clothing - Baba's two shabbas candlesticks, and some silverware. No more. Zeida and I dragged these sacks to Daddy's place.

All these things arrived in Brest before we did; in the years to come they turned out to be extremely useful and helpful.

The second rumors about evacuation trains proved to be true.

On October 4, 1939 - after one month and 4 days since the start of the war, out of which we had two weeks of Soviet administration, we left our town, our home - our beloved town, where we used to stroll arm-in-arm with friends on Friday evenings, exchanging warm smiles with passers-by - where we felt their feeling of friendship and affection flowing to us, where we were filled with the same for them - where we were among friends.

We haven't heard anything about Daddy's whereabouts. I kept believing that on the other side of the river Bug our chances of meeting will be very good. On the west side of the demarcation line, mainly in Warsaw and also in a few other cities, all our relatives remained - Zeida's parents, two married brothers and their families, one single brother, and many, many other relatives, as well as Baba's very many relatives. Baba, Zeida and I were refugees now.

After a few hours, the train full of us arrived at Brest. Daddy's father was at the station with a hand wagon and helped us with our three small suitcases to Baba's aunt's apartment. We were lucky; others did not have relatives in Brest - they headed for the synagogues, where the floors became their sleeping and living space.

Heniek and Adek were at the apartment already - later their father from Warsaw came to join them here for a short time, their sleeping place - an improvised "bed" in the dining room. We were given a very small, but a separate room. This was fortunate again.

Baba had also, in addition to the aunt, her husband, and their only daughter who was living with her husband in a separate rented room, a few cousins in Brest. A few times, this daughter invited me to her place to take a bath there,

while she and her husband were away during the day (her parents did not have this kind of "luxury" in their apartment).

Later on, one of Baba's married cousins offered me a place to sleep in their apartment (for some time). They, too, had a bathroom, and a bath with warm water, where everyday I would bathe and scrub myself thoroughly and faithfully - always in fear to miss this opportunity, in fear that tomorrow I may not have one. I was very grateful to my hosts and very appreciative of these comforts.

To top all the good things, one to be most thankful for happened one day, two weeks after our arrival in Brest, while walking on the street, not far from Baba's aunt's apartment - I suddenly faced Daddy - beside his bicycle, walking toward me.

CHAPTER II

So, Daddy's five-week odyssey, with dangers and a few close brushes with catastrophes, ended luckily.

Very soon, however, in a matter of a couple of days only, Daddy started out, without telling me about it (surely I would have asked him not to do it), on a last dash to Mezricz — partly by trains and partly by horse-driven wagons.

He saw his family - his mother quickly packed some of Daddy's clothes, and some towels and bed lines. Daddy still managed to go to our apartment, got some clothes from our wardrobe, one (of three) down bed comforters (prevzyma) and our short-wave, new telefunken radio.

After just a couple of hours since his arrival - in the darkness of the night, while the news was quickly spreading that the Germans entered the town, Daddy was rapidly leaving in a horse-driven wagon. He arrived in Brest safely, and so he left his home definitely. Daddy settled in Rachela's (his sister's) house. I, at that time, still stayed together with Baba and Zeida at the aunt's (Mirke) apartment - later I slept at Baba's cousin's (Jakob Gefen) place.

Daddy got somewhere a Russian language book for beginners and started to help me with it. We both enrolled in a course for teachers - conducted in Russian. We also attended all kinds of lectures and speeches - in Russian.

It became necessary to learn the language. In addition to the military of all branches and ranks, Russian administrative personnel and their families (even their extended families, (mothers-in-law, etc.) were arriving in great numbers in Brest (and in all other places occupied by the Soviets accordingly as the Soviet-German Pact).

Soviet personnel were placed in all managerial and higher administrative positions in city government and agencies, as well as in many previously privately owned business enterprises.

Zeida, Daddy and I would have to get some kind, any kind of paying employment very soon. Zeida sold the telefunken radio, which Daddy managed to fetch from our apartment on his last dash home. This was our only support money now. We considered our hosts extraordinarily kind to us; when we first arrived, they treated us to a meal, the only meal - they didn't have much for themselves; we didn't expect, we were not offered, and we would not accept any more; giving us shelter was kind enough. It was a heaven for us. But, of course, the "radio" money could not last long. We were looking for work.

Adek Offerman, Celinka Rabinowic's boyfriend, a medical student from Warsaw University, got a job as a medic at the Brest train station's clinic for travelers. He managed to get a cheap room in a family apartment. Heniek Offerman, Irka Rabinowic's - Offerman's husband and Adek's brother, a medical doctor with a couple of years practice in Warsaw, got a job as a doctor in the Brest prison - later he was transferred to a town farther east, but still in Polish territory, Kobryn, also at a prison. Their father Mr. Offerman decided to return to his wife in Warsaw and then maybe try again to leave together with her.

Zeida, Daddy and I were going from place to place, inquiring about jobs, filling out applications and writing the strictly required autobiographies, background, parents' occupation, etc. Here we had to invent some "survival lies": Zeida's father, the chasidic Rabbi, became a teacher; Zeida, the Cantor, became a concert singer, choir leader and music teacher; Daddy's father, a quite well-to-do international fur merchant, became a small-town, poor businessman.

Daddy was the first one with his success; he landed a job in a bakery - bread store. Later he advanced to the position of a distributor in a Distribution

Center, which was allocating bread and other bakery goods to a whole district, Brest and places around it in the district.

Also Zeida, on his rounds of various cultural city departments found a job, which was a challenge to him and gave him quite some satisfaction - but no pay. He became the musical director and conductor of the city choir - kind of a city cultural club, whose members and singers were mostly women of the local "intelligentsia" and the professional class. Zeida enjoyed it, and in this group he met people who later were helpful to us in some ways.

I took the first job I was sent to, in a kind of a City Employment Department - OTDELTRUDA - literally: Department of Work. I was to register people coming in for jobs.

The general manager (Nacrairick) of this department was a Soviet man. Almost all employees in this office were local people. A few were actually in charge of assigning jobs; to one, who seemed to me to be a decent human being, I talked about Zeida, and consequently, after an interview, etc., Zeida became kind of an administrator and rent collector in one of the previously privately owned apartment buildings, now taken over by the new occupation government.

So, finally, though the pay was very low and the prices were rocketing with every passing day, we had the monthly money (in rubles) for our daily meals. We were not starving - but we were always hungry.

In the meantime, people were still somehow crossing the new borders - some - broken, lonely, misplaced were going back to the German occupied territories, to their families and familiar places; others were going there only to reunite with their close ones and come back together to the Soviet occupied places. New refugees were still coming from all over Poland west of the river Bug, the demarcation line. Warsaw, after a long siege, has fallen to the Germans some time ago.

One day we were deeply stirred when Irka (with a colleague from medical school) arrived suddenly in Aunt Mirke's apartment. Shortly afterward her younger sister Celinka came with a few relatives of Heniek and Adek. They told us that only one of Zeida's brothers, Joseph (Yoske), left Warsaw, but they didn't know where he was now. Irka and her colleague, (Alexander (Ilek) Marszalkowics, whom she later married after divorcing Heniek Offerman) soon left Brest, then later settled in a south-eastern city, Lwow.

Celinka, now together with Adek Offerman, stayed in Breast for the time being. Celinka was only seventeen years old that 1939. Two years earlier she accidentally caught fire and some parts of her body were badly burnt; she was very ill for a few months, and although her burns healed well, her body was extremely sensitive to cold. Eventually, she too, was looking for some kind of paying work, the only one she was able to get was shoveling snow. (There existed a certain state of emergency in the region after a heavy snowfall which halted transportation in many places; as I was told in the office, all young job applicants were being sent to snow-shoveling only. Later, even people holding jobs already, including me, were ordered to go together in teams to shovel snow (without pay) on their only day off per week from their regular work).

Celinka was assigned to shovel snow off the rail-tracks near the train station where Adek worked inside in the medical center: Even though she managed to run in from time to time to warm up there, she couldn't continue after three days - she suffered terribly from the cold and she had to give up. She was lonely and uncomfortable. She used to come to Baba during the day, sit around and chat. Often, coming back from work, I would see her, and we would spend some time together. We all loved her so much.

Daddy's youngest brother, Chaim, a tall, slender, fifteen-year old youth came to Brest and stayed at their oldest sister's Rachela's house for some time.

Out of my former classmates only three crossed the border to the Russian side. One of them, Sheindl Ciemna, my dearest friend, left our town together with her parents, brothers and sisters, and with her love and future husband Shamshaw (Shaeh) Kowalcruk at about the same time we did. Sheindl and Shaeh moved on to Lwow. The two other former classmates, both names Hershel, arrived in Brest also and stayed here for some time until the refugees' situation completely changed.

A chasid and follower of my grandfather Rabbi Shlojme - Meir Rabinowics, passed through Brest, and risking his freedom and maybe even life if caught, brought with him a ten-rubel gold coin for us from my grandfather.

While the war in Europe - now outside Poland - was raging, and Germany continued to proceed on its "Blitzkrieg," our life in Brest was going on, with the daily, prosaic struggle for subsistence - and the always present uncertainty about our fate tomorrow. Many young refugees, who were "going steady," if under normal circumstances, wouldn't get married yet, were marrying now in a hurry and in great numbers, (in marriage ceremonies performed by any Jew; not necessarily a Wlleu) to be together and not to lose each other in a possible chaos of tomorrow. Before the war started, though Daddy and I were not teenagers, we hadn't planned on marrying yet. First we had to plan our future. Daddy was working toward emigrating to Cuba, where Chil, his oldest brother, lived at that time. I was making preparations toward entering a 3-year boarding school for nurses in Warsaw - and we both dreamed about eventually reuniting in Cuba.

The war started and everything has changed. It became most important for us two to be together now. Through a stroke of luck or coincidence, in answer to Zeida's inquiries, one of the ladies in Zeida's choir told him about a family living in a roomy house, who were notified by the new city administration that they decided to requisition two rooms from their house. Again, through a stroke of

luck or coincidence, Zeida got the idea to give this piece of valuable information to one of the two Hershels, my former classmate, who now stayed in Brest with family friends, local residents of Brest and previously from our town. Actually, the happy coincidence was, that one room in the same apartment was occupied by a recently arrived Soviet man - presently the Director of the City Housing Department.

In return for his information about the two rooms, Zeida wanted Hershel to get from this Russian Director an official paper for these rooms, one for Daddy and myself - and one for Hershel and his future wife, a very young teenage girl, who was still home. Zeida's plan worked. Hershel got the paper for the two rooms. (Unfortunately, the paper was made out in his name only. Later, Daddy and I felt the consequences of it).

In a short time, not only this Hershel with his newly married wife - but also the other Hershel also with his just married wife moved into one of the rooms - even before Daddy and I did.

Before moving in, naturally, we were expected to get married, and only by a full-fledged rabbi. And so we did. We got married in the rabbi's home, in complete darkness, with no family or friends present, on a Saturday evening, December 31, 1939.

Next morning, January 1, 1940, brought a fine, bustling day. Daddy and I moved into our first place together. The present was bright and good.

CHAPTER III

It was in a residential area with wide sidewalks and wide, clean streets - a one story solid house, a small court with a park-like bench on one side, a small yard with trees in the back. There was a large kitchen and even a bathroom with a tub - but no warm water. Our room was a fine one, with a big window with shutters, facing the little court.

There was a round, dark wood table with a few chairs, and a wide, modern "tapcran" (a kind of a very wide couch, with a place for bedding underneath the upholstered top), which we covered with a thick, brown blanket with blue/green stripes at both ends, the same blanket that Daddy's younger sister Pola (Pearl) took off their "tapcran" and gave Daddy when he first left home on his bicycle. In addition, Zeida managed, with the help of some of his choir members, to get for us a small, dark wood wardrobe, a few fine cups and saucers, a white enamel, large bowl for washing up - and even a big, decorative pillow for the "tapcran."

We were so fortunate, it was fine place, even though the room had one drawback, it was a middle room - our friends, the two Hershels and their wives - Hela and Edzia - had to pass through our room to go to the kitchen and the bathroom. They tried to be discreet.

The owners (or maybe not owners anymore) were a middle-aged Catholic couple with two young daughters, the younger, maybe ten years old, blond, and a teenager with long, brown braids. The man, before the war, had been a government employee (hence, this good housing) was now unemployed and rather sickly looking; his wife - a pleasant, blond and plump housewife.

I can still see the older daughter, slowly, almost religiously, carefully not to waste any parts, peeling potatoes in the kitchen. We used the kitchen only to boil water for our tea in the mornings and evenings. We kept our white-enamel wash-

bowl in the bathroom, which, even though we couldn't use its tub for lack of warm water, we appreciated very much for its private space for washing up. It helped to use some warm water from the tea kettle in the kitchen. In addition, summer and winter, we used to go to the city's bath-house once a week. Zeida was in charge of the moneys the three of us were earning. Baba was taking care of our combined "household."

Directly after work and on our once a week days off, Daddy and I would come to Baba and Zeida's room and have our dinner there. Later in the evenings, Zeida used to drop in to our place on his way back from the choir rehearsals.

And so, "counting our blessings," we lived our momentarily routine days of the precarious winter of the year 1940. It was a very harsh winter, with icy streets and very scare and high-priced wood and coal we needed to keep us at least comfortably warm and to cook our not too big meals.

Fewer and fewer people were crossing the borders, and fewer reports from the other side were reaching us here. We heard that the Nazi's beat up our town's Rabbi on the street of Migdayvnee. We pained. We knew, which I have never doubted before, that Zeida's instinct to leave was a rational one.

The sphere of the German occupation was getting larger and deeper - with the war still raging on and the desperate resistance being crushed.

Late in this winter, on two occasions, I got two separate work assignments outside of the office I usually worked in. One was to take information and data of people living in large apartment buildings on the streets immediately surrounding the office, for the on-going population census the Soviets were now trying to put together. The second task was of a very different nature, importance and weight of consequences it carried for us.

It was also census taking, but only of refugees, newcomers to the city. All over the city big posters were put up on the walls of buildings announcing that

each refugee should come to especially set-up offices in many locations - register there and answer all questions.

I was assigned as a census taker in one of these one-clerk temporary offices - and I, too, as a refugee, had to register, give my exact address and to answer three crucial questions or options:

1) Would you like to return now to your place, where you lived before the war - the place, which is now occupied by the Germans? If you do, arrangements will be made between the Soviet and the German governments to transport you there.

2) Would you like to apply for Soviet passport and become a Soviet citizen, (at the same time giving up the Polish citizenship)? In this case, if you do, you will have in a matter of a few weeks to leave Brest and move deeper into the Soviet territory, at least 150 kilometers from the border.

3) Do you prefer not to return to the German territory now, not to apply for Soviet citizenship, but to remain in Brest for the time being?

The refugees were coming en masse, prying on the doors, pushing the lines ahead of them, very anxious to register as soon as possible, as long as these options are still open to them - as though expecting some kind of salvation.

The four of us answered negatively to the first two options, positively to the third one:

1) Zeida, Daddy and I were absolutely sure that we don't want to go back to the places occupied by the Germans. Baba, of course registered the same way, but not wholeheartedly. She even tried to change our minds. She kept pointing out to us that so many people we knew, friends and neighbors stayed in Mezrich. This misplacement, this refugee life was probably hardest on her - she

missed the apartment, she missed the household, she felt very inconvenienced, she missed all the nice things she left behind, and she probably at this point considered us a little reckless. She would rather that we decide to go back home now.

2) We were very apprehensive to take out Soviet citizenship - we felt that after the war we will be bound by this act and by this document forever, and that we will not have the choice of leaving the Soviet Union. All four of us agreed completely on this point.

3) We hoped to be able to stay in Brest and wait out this difficult period here in peace. We hoped that eventually the Germans will be defeated - (by whom?) - that the war will end and that we will be free to return home. We chose this option, not knowing, of course, that the Soviets had a prepared scheme for the near future for the people who made this choice.

After the registration, we all returned to our routine, daily life, with considerable peace of mind.

Soon will be spring.

CHAPTER IV

During the first week of March, 1940, just before the Soviet "Woman's Day" on March 8, I lost my job. Excuse given: "Staff Reduction."

Again, thanks to Zeida's persistent inquiries and maybe pleas, one of his new acquaintances, this time a tenant of an apartment building where Zeida was assigned to collect rent, gave him the information of a possible job opening. It turned out to be a minor clerical job. I was hired and I started to work there the first week of April.

It was a small office under the management of a Soviet official. The clerks around me were mostly young, local women (not refugees), who kept together and to themselves. Only on one occasion one of them shared with me the rather important information about the time and the store, where some produce will be available. I realized these young women looked so differently from the way I looked then. They appeared to be relaxed, rested, quite well fed, good-looking in really ironed dresses, while I felt uncomfortable most of the time, an outsider, always cold and a little hungry, worried and confused, thin and haggard, in wrong and "tired" looking clothes, a typical refugee.

Luckily, however, April was here and spring was growing in strength. Soon the warm, bright sun, beautiful, blue skies, the budding trees, the wonderful Polish spring will start its magic, and heal and melt away, and overcome a lot of the gloom.

I washed the windows and let the sun in. I took out the few summer dresses I have managed to bring with, washed, hung them out in the fresh-smelling air. Washed my hair often and let them too dry in the sun. I was beginning to feel pleasantly warm inside and my appearance reflected it. Once a week, on our day off, Daddy and I started to go to the city park. It was a very

fine park, green and neat, with big lawns, paths for strollers lined with trees, with garden benches, and even a place for dancing and a small band.

Here in the park, the other newcomers to this city, the Soviets, especially young Soviet soldiers and young Soviet women were highly visible. They were the only band players and the only dancers in the park. All others, Daddy and I among them, were the audience, and I must say, the fascinated audience. Their music, sometimes exuberant, sometimes very sad, their dancing made me see them better.

The spring and its merciful weather must have created again an opportunity (the very last one) for the people on the German side of the demarcation line to cross the river Bug to Brest. One of them, my second cousin on Baba's side of the family in Warsaw, Esther Rubinstein and her just married husband passed through Brest now and found us. She was so much less fortunate then I was. Her parents and her brother remained in Warsaw.

In May, and in early June, the implementation of the refugee's registration began. The small group of refugees who opted for returning to their towns and cities on the German side were transported to the border in cooperation with and with the agreement of the German authorities. The second group, a much larger one, of refugees who chose to apply for Soviet citizenship and Soviet passports, were required to move out of Brest now, much further away from the border.

The third group, to which we belonged, the largest one, of refugees who signed up for neither of the above and took the third offered option to remain in Brest, were not yet mentioned in any publicly announced instructions.

Celinka and her husband Adek Offerman, who chose the second option, had to leave Brest and we had to part. We were all very sad, we loved her so much and didn't even know what to advise her, didn't know whose choice, which option is the best. She told me of a foreboding that was terrifying her: that her

husband, Adek, as a Soviet citizen now, will be taken into the Soviet army, and that she saw herself left all alone trying to tear through a front in a new war between the Germans and the Russians, in an effort to return to her parents in Warsaw. She told me she had nightmares about it, and these were her last spoken words to me. They went to Lwow, in the southeastern part of Poland, now occupied by the Russians. Much later we received a letter from her.

Irka and her new husband Olek Marszalkowicz also Irka's former husband Heniek Offerman, who later married Celinka's friend already lived in Lwow then. Heniek accepted Soviet citizenship, Irka and Olek did not; they chose to keep their Polish citizenship. Our friends, the two couples in the adjoining room applied for and received Soviet passports. They, too, had to leave to go deeper and further away from the border.

Not very much later we discovered that their leaving affected and changed our official rights to our room. We actually were left without any document proving our right to occupy it. This document or permit for both rooms was originally made out under the name of one of our friends, Hershel Rubinstein (later Rylski), who had a connection (a "clout") and managed to get it. Now, when he left, we were not protected by any legal paper. For the time being we were ordered to move into the smaller room, and, of course, we did.

We cleaned and scrubbed and washed windows again. Our new room was nice and bright. The one window and a glass door were facing a wide and elegant avenue with interesting passers-by, many of them Soviet military.

Zeida, most probably looking very hard for a cheering-up touch to our new room, brought us a "house-warming" present (which he somehow managed to get from one of his choir members) - a large, framed print of a vase with colorful roses. The picture did look very pleasant on the wall.

And so we continued to live quietly, enjoying the gift of life and the gifts of spring. As it turned out later, this was only a time of a temporary grace.

A middle-aged Soviet couple moved into the room we previously lived in. The man knocked on our door and quietly but firmly and officially informed us that he now has the legal permit for both rooms. He told us in the same contained voice and manner to look for another place. He kept repeating his low-keyed, but ominous evening visits, with each time adding a little more pressure and urgency for us to move out. Once he told us that his mother-in-law will be soon coming, and certainly he needs a separate room for her. It would be very improper and even immoral for a married couple, him and his wife, to share a room with another person.

In the meantime, some refugees who did not take out Soviet passports, mostly men with better than average positions, were being fired. In my office I heard whispers of compassion on account of a man (with a family and children) who was let go. Then it hit us, too. Daddy lost his job.

Under these circumstances there was no point to try to get a permit for another room; we would not get it. Zeida and I were still working, in uncertainty about what tomorrow will bring in regard to it. Adverse events kept coming and mounting, closer to one another and with growing intensity.

Frightening news started to spread: plainclothesmen, Soviet Internal Security Police, in the middle of the night are arresting single refugee men, even snatching them off the streets in bright daylight, and deporting them to closed labor camps deep into Russia's northeastern net of infamous slave centers.

(Zeida brought us fresh, real roses, a gift from one of his choral group members; they looked like a live version of the print Zeida gave us a couple of weeks ago. We put the flowers on a small table right under this print, and both

faced the glass entrance door. The fresh roses and the print were beautiful and defiant.)

This night, following the day gorgeous with the gift of roses, they knocked on our glass door - a man in a military uniform and a plainclothesman entered - facing the wall with the spring's colorful display. They asked our names; they asked if we are singles or husband and wife and they left.

A day or two, a week or two, later, I don't know, Daddy brought a big "kosz," - a wicker-trunk, from his sister Rachela's house.

Zeida took out the saved, and for months carefully hidden, ten-rubel tiny gold piece, which his father had sent him from Warsaw by his devoted Chasid—messenger—and now Zeida exchanged it for close to six hundred paper rubels, and, again kept this money, now legal currency, for a day even more "rainy" then the present one.

I don't know how many days or weeks passed. I don't know what was happening during this time.

Then came the night of June 29, 1940. Again this knock on our glass door; this time two Soviet plainslothesmen entered. They told us to get dressed and pack our belongings.

I still did not comprehend or accept the scope of all of it. I thought, it involves us only, that it is a single case, it even crossed my mind in a flash that our neighbor arranged it in order to get our room. While throwing things into the trunk that Daddy had prepared, I explained to the two Russians that we have here my father's two good suits and that I would like to leave them here for Zeida. The Russians told me to take them with, and I did not understand why. At the very last minute I remembered our enamel wash-bowl in the bathroom and I got it. Then I saw that our Soviet neighbors were not in their room and this reinforced my suspicion as to their part in our arrest.

The Polish family in the house did not come out of their rooms.

We left the roses, the picture on the wall, the luxurious little wardrobe, the delicate teacups and saucers on a shelf in it, the last little enhancements.

They drove us to an office in a building occupied by the Soviets. They checked our names again. We were taken downstairs. The courtyard was full of people with suitcases and bundles. So we were not the only ones. Again into the truck and then we were at the Brest train station - our belongings thrown in front of one of the many cars of a train. We were in the middle of a pandemonium, where we became part of all other confused, scared, desperate people, surrounded by soldiers with rifles at ready position. Now, terribly worried and alarmed about Baba and Zeida, we looked for them in the crowd, but to no avail. And they, apparently, felt the same about us and desperately looked for us also. Suddenly, Daddy's very good friend, Avroom Blushein, found us. He said that Baba and Zeida's transport has already left, that he saw them, that Zeida begged him to look for us, and gave him a hundred rubels to give us in case he finds us.

So we were now separated from Baba and Zeida, but still hopeful that all these transport-trains will go to the same place, were we will find them.

Avroom Blustein was assigned to a different train.

We faced our train, - the "eshalow," - the transport. It was a very, very long train with many cars. A cattle train. Soon we were to be loaded into it.

Each car had assigned to it two soldiers with a list of names of arrested. They started to call out the names on their list and herded us with our bundles into the cars.

There was nobody to say good-bye to. The few relatives we had in Brest were probably too scared, and justifiably so, to come here, so easy to get mixed into this refugee crowd and to be pushed together into the transport.

We were inside the cars, the station was suddenly empty, except for the soldiers with their rifles at ready guarding the doors, but for one, single defiant and outraged man.

With a big, black beard; long, black Kapota; black rabbinical hat, he was there, at the water pump, pumping the water furiously, filling the bucket, carrying it, from wagon to wagon, returning to the pump, filling the bucket again and returning with it again to the people waiting at the doors of the wagons, waiting for the water, filling any and every available container with water for the long, long journey. The soldiers with their rifles at ready did not dare to stop the defiant Jew. His visible outrage and determination to help emanated undefeatable strength.

Very late in the afternoon the long train started to move and until then he was pumping the water and carrying the buckets incessantly, and he remained there for a long time afterward, facing the gradually disappearing train with deportees, standing there all alone, strong, defiant, sad - most probably praying for us with all his mighty heart and godly devotion.

We will remember him gratefully forever and he, too, remembered us until his death.

CHAPTER V

The train was gaining speed; we stepped away from the doors. The soldiers disappeared, probably to their own wagons, and left the heavy, sliding doors of our cattle car open—one of the blessings we must not fail to count. The first in importance, and the vital blessing was that Daddy and I were still together, and I was not taking it for granted. However, our thoughts and pervasive worries about Baba and Zeida, away from the two of us, alone, without us to maybe help them to cope, were always with me and with Daddy.

Now Brest was gone from our sight. We burned inside. We were close to sixty people in this one car—adults and children; all families. Crowded together, bewildered, afraid—looking askance one at another in desperate search of some faint assurance—of some hope—looking one at another with mutual compassion. The inactiveness did not last long. Soon, forcefully shaking off the overwhelming feeling of helplessness, everybody started the work of getting "settled"—each family trying to find a little space for themselves together.

And so we all took a very decisive step—we started to act—in the long, continuous, every day, every minute—hard—never letting up battle ahead of us,—the quiet, tedious but determined struggle for survival.

We were all strangers here; just thrown together by force. Naturally and understandably, each family was preeminently concerned about their own members' welfare. Still, there was no pushing, shoving, grabbing of better places—and no disagreements. It was a cattle wagon, like all the other ones for the prisoners in this long, forsaken train.

There were two very narrow, small, glassless windows or rather openings,—one at each end of the wagon,—high up,—almost touching the ceiling. There were

some "amenities" added to these cars built originally for cattle,—"amenities" for people.

In the middle of the floor,—not far from the doors,—there was a stove,—black-iron one, for wood burning, small, with space for one pot only,—and with a pipe reaching a hole in the ceiling. There were also two "lofts"—on each of the narrow sides of the wagon. These were crudely nailed together boards, set up there, most probably, in order to crowd in here more people than cattle this car was meant to fit in.

Daddy pushed our wicker trunk just to the right of the doors,—under the upper boards. Even though, because of the size and weight of this trunk we could not look for a place, probably a better one,—above the floor,—on the "upper deck,"—thanks to the same trunk we did not have to sleep on the floor itself. The trunk, with a blanket and a pillow on top of it, served us very well and "luxuriously" as our bed.

I soon cuddled up on it and dozed off.

The train was moving slowly now. It was making rhythmic sounds and sometimes stopping on some side tracks.

During one of these stops, late this first day, the guards brought in a kettle of soup. Somebody lent us a bowl and a spoon, and we took turns sipping the warm, murky liquid. Daddy persuaded me to get up, to sit around with the other people, to look out through the partially open doors. The "soup" helped a little too, and I managed to do it for a while.

The night came, we all were resting now, spread all over,—on the floor around the stove and all the way to the very ends of the wagon, under the "lofts" and on the "lofts."

Except for the sounds of the moving train, it was very, very quiet.

With heavy hearts, each of us here was drawing comfort and solace from the only, most important and vital source,—from the closeness of their loved one. Rocked away by the train traveling through unknown, mysterious places, to an unknown destination and fate, mercifully we were falling asleep, and sleeping, going through a blessed renewal.

This too came to an end. Our first night of what was going to be a very long journey.

Morning came and the light was thrusting its way even into these forsaken cattle cars. It was still quiet though, except for the small voices of the hushed down children. The day was here,—with its realities and needs.

There were none of any,—even the most primitive kind,—sanitary facilities; no toilets, no water.

And there was no food. There was no hurry to face the day.

After a while, somebody opened the doors, and people slowly started to stir.

We got up from our improvised, all-purpose trunk-bed. Unbelievable to us, there was a beautiful, early summer outside. Nature, fortunately undisturbed by war and peoples' plight, continued its normal cycles. Standing at the doors, we saw the green train embankments—now and then wild, small flowers. We felt the warm morning sun. Instead of water, the gentle breeze cleansed our faces, dried our clothes. Time stood still, there was no hurry. The train continued on its journey.

Then, unexpectedly, it came to a stop,—not at a station, but, it seemed, in the middle of nowhere, on some side tracks.

Nobody moved for a while. Then the soldiers, with their rifles at ready, appeared in front of the wagons through the whole length of the train. Still, nobody made any move, until a few, and then more people started to climb out

from the cars—first cautiously, obviously uncertain about what the soldiers' reaction will be—then gradually the whole mass of the imprisoned was jumping out with increasing determination and boldness. The soldiers looked on, with their rifles poised at us all the time, very attentively and somewhat nervously, but they did not stop us from coming out of the train.

We found ourselves, it seemed, in a desolated area. No houses—no people; no wells, no water pumps—no water. Just some patches of grass, and now and then, almost in front of our train—bushes with fresh leaves. Instantly, the recognition of the opportunity came. Bushes and leaves—privacy and "toilet paper."

With our old need for at least some privacy still intact, women with women only rushed behind some clusters of bushes, while men disappeared together slightly away from us. And so a solution offered itself to one of our problems, and this remained so throughout the whole two weeks we were on this train.

After a few minutes the soldiers started to holler "davay v vagon"—"get into the wagon"—a call they kept shouting at every stop, and which made them hoarse after a few days. (We learned to imitate them, and had fun doing it).

So we all quickly reappeared, with anxiety looked for one another, and returned to our cars. We were moving again, and on the journey, which by land alone was to take two full weeks.

The trip was a very slow one, with short stops during the days, longer ones during the nights. At night, not the movement of the train, but the stops were waking us up, and at these times our anxieties were at the highest—and the children's cries the loudest.

The short stops at daytime, which never took place at train stations, were literally life-saving. At some, we were finding water, and at times there was even enough time to quickly rinse our faces and to take some water with us. We had

only one container, a small, aluminum soldier's flask ("manierka"), which Daddy had with him on his first "odyssey" by bicycle,—and now this flask served us very well again.

At other stops, at the beginning with great and pleasant surprise, later with anxious expectation and relief, upon stopping we were met, right in front of the wagons, by peasant women in their flowerly babuskes with their very meager but welcome ware. Daddy would quickly jump out with the flask firmly in his hand and sometimes there was even milk to fill it up with. Other times he would come back with a chunk of dark, peasant bread—occasionally with a delicacy—fresh berries.

The one hundred rubles Zeida managed to send us through Abram Blustein, Daddy's friend, at the train station in Brest, became the vital means to our survival shopping. And so, Daddy and I, and all the other people in our wagon and in all the other wagons of our "echelon"—and in all the other transport-trains with prisoners, were hanging on to life.

The trip continued. The longer it lasted, the more the awareness grew among all of us that we are coming closer to the unknown, and dreaded destination. Our anxieties and fear grew. Now often they were expressed. Advice was sought and sometimes given.

The longer the trip lasted, the more also our realization grew that we are being transported to the very remote and most infamous slave labor camps.

How could we possibly cope there—survive there?

And is it worth to try to survive; will the Russians ever set us free? Will the Germans ever be pushed back and defeated? Will our homes, our towns and cities be ever free of them? Will there be a free land to go back to?

Many of us, utterly pessimistic, were despairing.

The memory of the Soviet purges and "trials," — the mass banishments and deportations of millions of their own people and of the known fact that these people were never released—weighed heavily on our minds.

Certainly we—distrusted foreigners, who refused to accept the offered Soviet citizenship—could not hope to receive a better and more just treatment than the one afforded their own citizens.

Others among us tried hard to somehow lift this pessimism and despair, probably from their own minds as well from the souls of all of us. Among them was Daddy. He presented to me, and to other people in the wagon, a different point of view. Daddy was saying that the fact that we are foreigners will be to our advantage eventually. Our fate, in the end, will not be the same as the one of the imprisoned Russians.

Daddy reasoned that the German domination and occupation will not last forever, and when this will end, the Soviets, under international pressure, will have to free us and even repatriate us. Therefore, it is worthwhile to go on living and to try hard to survive through the bad times. As hard and inhuman the conditions and the work in the labor camps may turn out to be, we must not try any sabotage—outright one or by a less obvious method like lack of effort at our future tasks. We should take care of our health, we should wisely and "economically" use our energies, but we should also try to work well—and this tactic may save our lives for the better times, which surely will come.

Our paths crossed, we almost talked with them,—we almost saw them. But it didn't happen.

At one of our stops in the middle of nowhere—this time without a living soul or any sign of life around, the improbable came. Suddenly we saw a man running alongside the train, and then we heard him shout our names. Baba and Zeida

were somewhere close by in their cattle train on a stop. They managed to reach the first man, who came out from another train, our train, they gave him our names and begged him to look for us, hoping, wishing that we are there.

Daddy and I started out at once, but it was already too late. Baba's and Zeida's train was moving. Frantically, we were running alongside the wagons, and then after the wagons, still calling their names. It was in vain; the train was gaining speed and we were helpless. Baba and Zeida did not see us; did not hear us.

Utterly upset, we tried though to calm ourselves with the reasoning that this meeting of the trains was a sure proof that we all are being taken to the same destination, and this thought gave us hope that we will be reunited there.

We were on our journey again. It was a very quiet afternoon, no stops, just the monotonous sound of the slowly turning wheels. Everybody retreated to their places, there were no conversations, the children were probably napping, and the adults—trying to. After a while, I crawled out quietly, trying not to disturb anybody, from our corner under the "loft." I sat down on the floor by the partially open doors and saw the lovely summer outside.

Then I heard voices—singing—exuberantly shouting—and here we were approaching an unbelievable sight.

A lively and lovely group of very young women, in summer, colorful dresses, as though in their "Sunday best,"—their hair not covered with the usual babuskas,—free, loose and light,—with bunches of field flowers in their hands—standing right there, alongside this train with prisoners. They were singing and shouting and waving to us. The train slowed down even more. And I looked and looked, and after we passed them, I could still see them clearly for some time. I was immensely touched, elated, and thankful.

I truly believed that these girls came here to show us their understanding, their support and their compassion.

And this is how it remained in my memory.

CHAPTER VI

Our journey of two weeks in the cattle train has ended.

Presently, thousands of us, in little family clusters—with bundles and all kinds of boxes, suitcases, racksacks and loose objects—were, as though soundlessly, filling up tightly the dirt-grounds—well trodden out by other recent many thousands before us, and probably by millions before them.

The air around me was grayish-blue, under an equally grayish-blue sky; in front: a dark gray fog; to the left: a wall-like, black, impenetrable darkness; in the back and to the right, on an embankment: the long, long train—empty—with the countless, by now familiar wagons. Below them: some kind of an open structure—a roof on posts—with no walls.

People were moving around ghostlike; maybe it was noisy—I heard no sound.

It was light with no sun.

Mysterious, erie, ominous.

The improbable happened again—for the second time. A message from Baba and Zeida: they are here, not far from us, just beyond the fog in front, below, by a river—and about to be transported away.

Daddy grabbed me and pulled me out from my daze. We were now on a cliff-like edge, confronted by a row of soldiers. No explanations, no pleas helped—the soldiers barred our way with their rifles.

Daddy made a bed-like place for me on our trunk, right in the middle of the crowd. Pained and drained, I sank into oblivion again.

Time was probably passing. I did not know how much. Daddy brought me a bowl of soup, a strange "treska" fish soup, which the soldiers were doling out from big, steaming kettles. Readily, even though in a semiconscious state, I gulped it.

Daddy told me the news which was spreading around: a man came out from the darkness at our left and hurriedly whispered to the people around him:

> this darkness is the beginning of endless northeastern forests, the location of infamous forced labor camps and their prisoners;
>
> The place we are in now is called Kotlas—a port-like city and a point (of no return), from which most cattle-trains transportees are to continue their trip on cargo barges on the river below, on the way to their assigned camps.
>
> We all are doomed to remain in these camps for our lifetime; there is no hope for us, as there is none for him; Kotlas is the beginning of the vast northern land, and the blue eriness around us is the "white northern summer night."

(And we eagerly ate our soup in the middle of the night).

In front, in the right corner, just before the slope going down to the river, the soldiers started to play Russian folk melodies on their harmonicas. Daddy said some of them danced energetically to the tunes. A small crowd of the transportees gathered around them.

I remained on the trunk.

And then a torrential rain, with lightning and thunder, came upon us.

We found out the merciful usefulness of the structure in the back—the roof on poles protected us partially from getting completely soaked by the rain. Daddy

pulled me with him, and we both, with many others, found some cover under that roof. Some people, huddled together, cried. I remained tearless and quiet.

In the morning, with the storm finally passed, the soldiers ordered us to gather our soaked belongings and to go down the slope to the river below in front of us. Not an easy task at all. The slope was deep and steep—the ground on it, after the heavy rain, very muddy and slippery.

I was of no help to Daddy. Now more and more dizzy, and seeing and hearing only through a foggy daze, I was "helping" by carrying one thing: our white enamel washbowl—and had to be helped; both of us—the washbowl and me had almost to be carried by Daddy and others all the way down.

And then, as soon as we settled ourselves and our trunk on the floor of the waiting barge, suddenly, I started to hear the overwhelming noise around me—closing in on me—and I blacked out.

I came to quickly, Daddy told me. I must have caused some commotion and concern around me. When I opened my eyes, I saw a few people bending over me.

It seemed that almost everybody settled down by now—crowded together on the scare space of this open deck—on their bundles or next to them on the floor.

The anxiety persisted.

It was much quieter now; the initial noise subsided. The daily treska soup was doled out.

The sun appeared. And wonder of wonders, it was the same, warm summer sun we knew and remembered lovingly from home. The water in the river below around us glittered from its rays.

Relaxation, mellowness slowly and gradually started to melt away our pains and fears.

And wonder of wonders. Soon some people, undisturbed by the guards, were in the water. Then I, too, was there, in the water close to the shore together with a few other women. Lacking our bathing suits, not considered very essential and left in our far away homes, we all were here in our underwear, covered by the water.

Most importantly, it was sheer pleasure, and we all rather deserved it. It was also so useful—sanitary. We bathed ourselves. We scrubbed ourselves and we scrubbed all the two week's accumulation of our dirty clothes.

Daddy went out for a swim. The water must have felt even lovelier farther out, where Daddy was swimming to. The river was vast and looked beautiful with the sun's reflection on the free, bold, shimmering waves. I, not a swimmer, stayed close to the shore and kept submerging myself in the clear, transparent, lovely water. It brought me great relief.

Suddenly, an alarmed and alarming voice from the shore cruelly put an abrupt end to my uneasy respite from the gloom. An elderly woman, standing on the shore at the edge of the rive, called me stupid and unconcerned about anybody—and shouted to me that, while I am frolicking here, Daddy is drowning.

She pointed to the area blocked from sight by the barge. Instantly, I ran out of the water, and as I was in my underwear only, I continued running on the shore and up to the top deck.

From there, I finally spotted Daddy, evenly and strongly swimming toward the barge. Ecstatically relieved and utterly drained I returned to the shore and picked up the clothes I had left behind.

CHAPTER VII

The barge was moving. We, the prisoners, were now in the inner part of the barge, all together on the floor. There was a roof over our heads; very little air and very little light.

It was quiet. Exhausted and weak, most of us were giving in to the slow rocking of the river—to uneasy dozing and some oblivion.

There probably was a daily fish soup, maybe even with a piece of black bread, but I don't remember eating. I don't remember washing my hands and my face, or if there was any water for us. There was one lavatory on the upper, open deck, and, of course, there always were long lines in front of it.

I remember that with some persuasion from Daddy, I would occasionally gather up my strength and all my will power, and go up on the upper deck just for some fresh air and sun. And in those moments the world still looked beautiful. It was July, 1940.

The trip by this barge lasted a week. And then the barge stopped. We were told to get out to the shore. Again, like in Kotlas, it was an eerie, white, northern night. Later we learned this place was called Ustwini.

It seems, we were expected here: there was the usual fish soup—ready and hot in the middle of the night. In addition, however, there was also a mysteriously looking and mysteriously behaving group of men, not soldiers. They stood together at a small distance from us, the prisoners. They did not say a word to us. They did look at us from time to time, secretly, but attentively. Then, immediately afterward, they huddled together and talked among themselves. We could not hear them.

As it turned out, Ustinim served as a place for distribution of the arriving slave-labor force—this was "a work-horse market." Of course, we, the prisoners

were the "work-horses." The mysterious men were the "buyers" from various forced labor camps in the area.

The "buyers' were carefully appraising the value of each of us as a "work-horse"—were haggling among themselves, and dividing us among themselves. Soon we were led to a very primitive road nearby and were told to get on the trucks that were waiting for us. We resumed our trip.

There was a silence all around—long stretches of barren land. No sign of any life, just here and there a drunkard sprawled by the roadside. A desolate land, forsaken, ominous.

There was a silence on our truck—one in a row of many similar trucks. There was a pervasive general realization that we will soon arrive at our unknown and dreaded destination. This ride lasted many hours; the roads were very bumpy. One elderly lady and her daughter kept crying loudly. Then the trucks drove off the road—continued on some paths—and stopped on a slightly elevated clearing. We stayed on the trucks and looked around apprehensively.

To the left and down from us there was some kind of a spread out log structure. In front of us—one large log barrack—then a cluster of small ones. In the back—a narrow path going down to a wooded area. To the right, closing the circle, almost next to our truck, there was a very small log cabin.

Some people, among them Daddy, got off the trucks and started to walk and look around the grounds—then they ventured inside of some of the barracks—and even scouted around. The little cabin by our truck turned out to be a small, sort of general store in a village. Soon I saw Daddy returning triumphantly with a few large bars of yellow, coarse laundry soap. Now one of the most precious articles and, if at all obtainable, was used not only for washing clothes, but also for luxurious personal washing—replacing the softly perfumed "Palmolives" of the

dreamlike world, which used to be our home, so far away in distance—but not even one year back in time.

CHAPTER VIII

Our journey of three weeks by land and water—in cattle wagons and in freight barges—then at the end in open trucks on deserted roads—thus has ended. We were now in Komi ASSR—one of many Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics. An upper northeastern land with long, severe winters and very short summers. A desolate land, with a vast, mostly virgin taiga and undeveloped tundra, scarcely populated by native Komi people with predominantly light complexions, light hair and European features—a people with their own Komi language and Komi customs. Also a land of outsiders, mainly people from various Soviet Republics and Autonomies, and of foreigners like ourselves. A forbidding land, covered all over with a web of prisons, camps and "special settlements."

Komi ASSR, one of the territories of "GULAG": Glavnoye Upravlenye Lagerow. Translated from Russian it means: Main Administration of Camps. Most of the detainees in these places were political prisoners; most of them held indefinitely without a trail, without a formal charge, without a sentence, brought here at various times since the Bolshevik revolution with each of the numerous "purges,"—the most recent and cruel one in the 1930s. The organization and rules in regard to prisoners in each of the three places of detainment, about which I knew when we were in Komi, differed to a certain degree. In prisons, the inmates were deprived of their civil and human rights and locked up in their cells to languish in utter and manifold misery. The camps were taking up vast areas, surrounded by concrete walls, barbed wire—secured with iron gates, each guarded by armed sentries—dominated by tall and multiple towers, their watchful guards always at ready position with the fixed rifles—filled with immense numbers of prisoners stripped of any rights by law or in fact. As in prisons, there were no

families. All camp prisoners were single people or people taken away from their families. All, unlike inmates in prisons, had to work, inside or outside the camps.

"Special settlements" had no visible walls, or fences around them—no visible watchtowers, no armed guards. There were many families, some even three generations' families—with children, parents and grandparents. In fact, there was a very strong, though invisible wall. The prisoners were forbidden to go beyond the area of the "settlement" without a special, very seldom issued, pass; nobody would risk to do it. Caught outside, without a valid Russian passport or other required legal Russian identification or a pass, one would be instantly arrested, separated forever from the family in the "settlement" and put in a prison or camp. Each "Special Settlement" had a small jail, where prisoners, who "displeased anybody in the administration, were put for certain periods of time for nights and days-off only and had to work on each work-day. This, however, was not the most dreaded punishment.

At the commandant's will, for a transgression or just for an alleged transgression, one could be separated from the family and transferred alone to a prison or a camp. This was the most dreaded punishment—the separation—and the threat of it was always hanging over each prisoner in the "Special Settlements"—this was the invisible wall and the rifles, which the "settlements' administration people did not carry.

Almost all <u>single</u> refugees, in Brest and in other cities and towns east of the river Bug and close to the Russian-German demarcation line (who did not accept the offer of Soviet passports and were not willing to move deeper into the Russian territories, but instead, as we did, not suspecting the consequences, chose the other given option to remain in place of the time being)—were brought to camps. Our group and other similar transports of mostly families, who preferred to keep

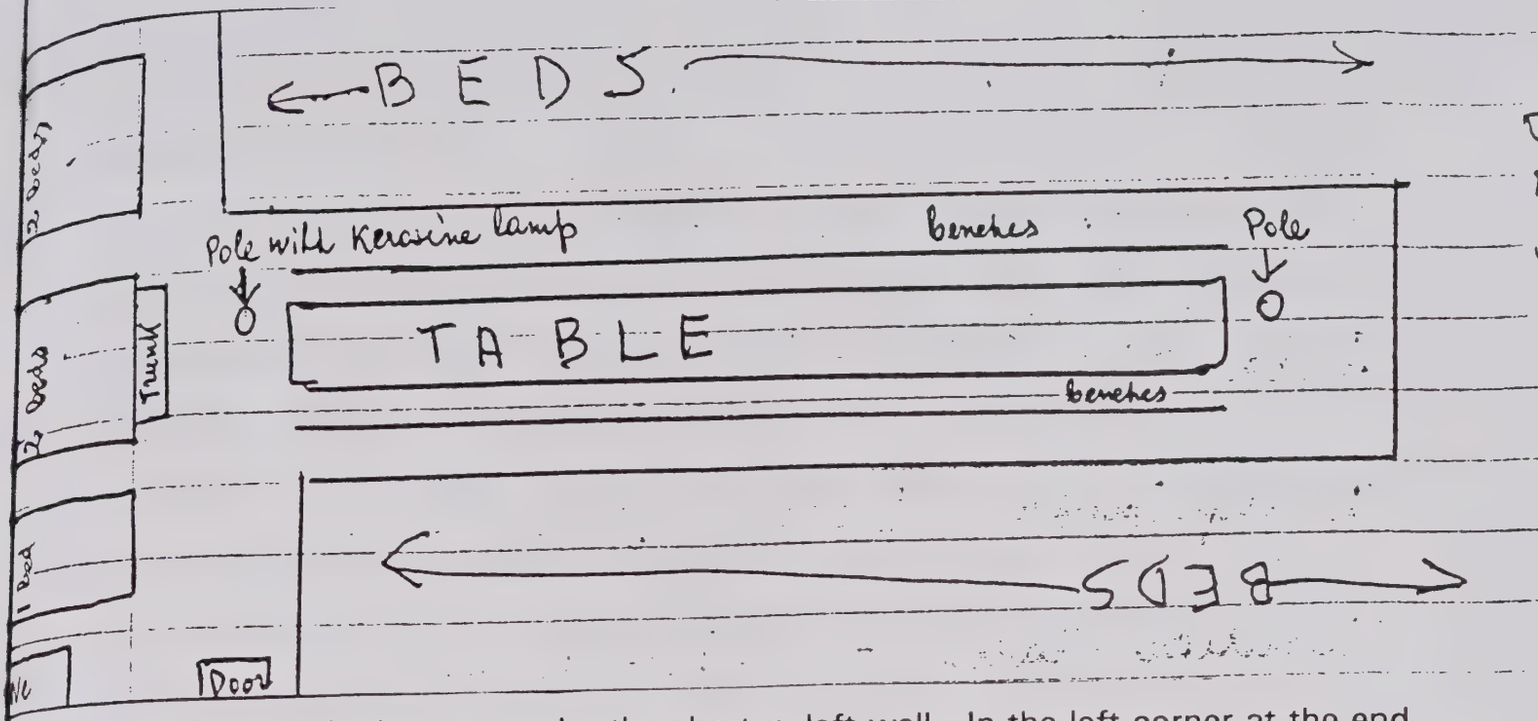
the Polish citizenship, were delivered to "Special Settlements." The name of our settlement was: Special Settlement Zada number 53.

CHAPTER IX

The trucks, which had driven us from Ustwim where we got off the barges, have already left. We were sitting on our bundles or next to them on the ground. Daddy and a few other men kept disappearing, coming back and going some place again. Nothing seemed to be happening. Just the fog of the numb exhaustion was getting denser around me. Then Daddy and the others with him came back again, and this time they started some action, even hurried action. Daddy and I, and a group of other people were to move into the big barrack next to where we were sitting. Helping one another we transferred our bundles, boxes, suitcases and trucks inside. It was a large rectangular room. The walls: crude logs. The longer walls were: one on the same side where the door was—the other, facing it had a few very small windows. Under the walls, all around, were narrow, bare, iron beds, very close to one another, all facing the room. Daddy went out again, and so did a few other people.

They came back with a big find: some sort of flat and narrow "mattresses," made of sack material and filled with straw. Each couple were allotted two pulled together beds and two "mattresses". We put our faithful wicker trunk at the foot of our bed, our beautiful white-enamel wash bowl under the bed. Then I looked around. To my immense pleasure I saw a few familiar faces, people I knew from our town.

This is what Daddy and his friends have accomplished. While I was sitting outside with the bundles, they were trying very hard to persuade the commandant to change his original orders and instead to assign us places together. And they finally succeeded.



Our two beds were under the shorter, left wall. In the left corner at the end of the longer wall there was a brick, wood-burning stove; in the middle of the room—a long, picnic-like table with benches; a kerosene lamp hanging on a pole.

My somber observing of the surroundings were interrupted. The word spread around that we were to go to the bathhouse. In our "Catch-all" trunk I found a change of clothes and two towels for Daddy and myself. Everybody else in our barrack was busy ? clean clothes for each family member, out of the hurriedly thrown together items in Brest at the time of the arrests. We were to go to the bathhouse in two groups—one of men; one of women. Opposite our barracks, past the little store, a path going down a slope took us to a very small log hut. Once inside, we were in a tiny room. At the left corner was a brick stove, filled with burning and crackling wood—very hot; on top—a huge, black-iron kettle steaming with hot water. On the floor—a barrel with cold water. Next to the stove, under the left wall there was a wide, wooden bench. We were to take off our clothes in this room and put them in separate bundles on the bench. Then we found a stack of small, black tin washbowls—a couple of big ladles for hot and cold water. Then each of us, carrying a bowl with water, entered the second, slightly larger room. There was no door between these two rooms. In the middle

of this second room there were two long benches—and here we placed our bowls, and began our "bathing."

It was very warm and very steamy all around. We were pouring out the used water in one part of the room on the floor, (where it was probably flowing out somewhere)—and then refilling the washbowls with fresh hot water. We even improvised a shower—by pouring bowlfuls of water over ourselves. This "bathhouse" was a Russian "bania." After three weeks without baths of any kind, this "bania" was very enjoyable—and one was even willing to accept the communal aspect of it. We came out well-scrubbed and quite refreshed.

On our return to the barracks, some people came and told us to put the clothes we just took off and any other clothes used on our trip in individual bundles, and give these bundles to them for steaming. Next, we were led down a slope to the left, and opposite the store, to another log house. This was an eating place. Each of us was handed a flat, gray, tin plate with thick, whole oats; in the middle of it—a teaspoon indention filled with fish-oil. It was a rather nauseating dish, but I ate it readily. So did everybody else. By now hungry for any food and at any time of day or night.

And so the camp administrators had fulfilled, (to the letter, if not real substance), the three regulation items of the day upon a prisoner transport's arrival to Special Settlement Zada #53: shelter, sanitation, feeding.

We returned to the barrack. The day was ending, a July day in year 1940, our first day in the "Gulag." The children were very tired, confused and disoriented. All our poor souls needed a quiet rest. We got out our priceless pillows and quilt from our trunk; and the prisoners' sacks filled with straw became transformed into our own castle—a castle for renewal and for building courage each night to face the miseries of the next day. A transparent castle, without walls

of any kind. Penetrating to it were sounds and noises, smells and odors, disturbing—yes—but also strongly reassuring. Each of us was drawing our peace and our inner strength from one another. The presence of these people all around us—who shared our lot—made this place a little less desolate—each of us a little less alone—and some of us even thankful for the blessings we still had—while others did not.

About two feet to the left from us and next to the stove there was a single bed occupied by a single young man from our town, Joseph Sliwka—restless and moaning—suffering from bad sores on his legs. To our right, at the very end of the left short wall, at about the same distance of two feet from us, there was a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Chag—Hinda, matronly looking, kind, always helpful and trying hard to maintain cleanliness under the most unfavorable conditions—and Chaim, strong looking, rocky-kind of a man, but very quiet and gentle in his manners—both probably in their thirties—both from our town.

Under the long hall opposite the door there were Hinda's two sisters and her cousin; the older sister—Mrs. Barnia with her husband and their five young children; and the younger sister, Malka and her husband. The cousin, a seventeen year old girl, Rifka and her equally young newly married husband, Leibl, who until the war was a member of Zeida's synagogue choir. (All these people stand out in my mind very clearly. If there were still others in our barrack, I do not remember them now. I do remember many from the smaller barracks). Except for us and Joseph Sliwka, the men and a few of the women in the group from our town, until the war, used to work in the brush industry, which was the main source of employment there. (Most of the manufactured brushes were exported to America, and because of this and of the fact that this gave the people a fine prosperity, our town was nicknamed "Little America").

Next to Rifka and Leibl, at the very end of the long wall, there was a mother with her four year old son—arrested at a moment while her husband was not with them, and thus separated from him and alone. She, a young woman—pleasant, not complaining, very energetic—her little son, Lolus—a blue-eyed blond cherub—looking lost. Next to them and alongside the short wall, facing our wall, there was the family Bojmelgrin from a town called Zwolyn (Zvolyn). They told us that my grandfather (Zeida's father), on a visit with his followers of that town, stayed in their house once. There were the senior Mr. and Mrs. Bojmelgrin. The trauma of the war, the effects of the long months of refugee life and of this last three weeks' trip as prisoners—the apprehension, and the worry about the whole family—were very apparent on them; two very thin, very sad looking, prematurely old people. With them was their son, Aron and daughter, Sara, the younger one of the two. Sara, in her twenties—attractive and outgoing, but often withdrawn and very melancholic.

With Aron was his wife, Mania, a dressmaker, expecting their first child in a few months. At the beginning of the long wall at right from the door, there was a teenage girl, Dwojrele, who home before the war was Mania's helper; stayed with Mania through the outbreak of the war, the refugee months in Brest, and was arrested together with the family Bojmalgrim.

Next to her there was a family from our town—Mrs. Ziebouka, a widow and her two barely teenage daughters. Next came a single bed with a single young woman—utterly helpless and confused. This was the end of any space on this wall. There was the door. The kerosene lamp on the post was out. The blond, two year old boy, youngest of the five Barnia children, was quietly calling for a cookie—repeating and repeating two words only: "Mamesie, a kichele" (Mommy, a cookie). Then this stopped, too. Overtired, without a cookie, he fell asleep. Quiet and a suspended peace enveloped the barrack. Were Baba and Zeida in

their barrack also? Where? How do they cope? And then, with Daddy's sustaining closeness, I, too, floated down into an uneasy sleep.

CHAPTER XI

Summer, 1940. Not quite a year since the start of the war in Poland on September 1, 1939. By now, the Nazi hordes have overrun most of Europe. Poland was cut in two and occupied by the Nazis west of the river Bug (including my dear forever Warsaw and my little, beloved Mezritch), and by the Red Army east of the river Bug (including the cities Brzesc and Lwow). Most of Zeida's and Baba's relatives lived in Warsaw, some in smaller cities and towns all over Poland, a few in Romania, Hungary and England. Most of Daddy's relatives lived in Mezritch and in Warsaw, a few in some other cities and towns in Poland.

Only a few of Zeida's relatives in Warsaw, even though it was dangerous but still possible, left the city at the beginning of the war or at the very beginning of the German occupation. Zeida's brother, Josef Rabinowicz—my dear uncle, friend and advisor. Gift-giver of books. Bright and intelligent, teacher and accountant. Witty and happy in spite of a physical handicap, caused by a fall in his infancy. The others who left Warsaw still in time were my cousins Irka and Celinka and their husbands. Only one of Baba's relatives left Warsaw and passed through Brzesc, a cousin my age, with whom I used to go to grammar school, Estusia Rubinstein with her husband.

Daddy's youngest brother, Chaim, managed to come to Brzesc to Rachela's, their sister's house, but he stayed there for a short time only and returned home to Mezritch. Three of my friends and classmates: Szejndla Ciemna with her family and her husband, Stanislaw (Stash) Kowalczak—Herszek Szynkavs with his wife Edzia—Herszek Rubinstein with his wife also left Mezritch and came to Btzesc.

All other relatives, friends, classmates—most of the population stayed in their cities and towns—bracing themselves for difficult times, hoping for the end of the German occupation some day—never imagining the disaster that came.

Zeida and Baba must be somewhere in one of the labor camps in the gigantic net of camps all over this north-east part of the Soviet Union. Daddy and I were desperate to hear from them, to know how they are, how they cope—to be in touch with them.

We wanted to believe in two things: one, that Rachela, Daddy's sister, because she was married to a permanent resident of Brzesc and therefore, was not a refugee, still lives untouched at her old address in Brzesc. The other hope was that Baba and Zeida will write to her. Daddy had already written to Rachela and now we had just to wait for her answer. We hoped that this will turn out to be true—that through Rachela's contact we will eventually get in direct communication with Baba and Zeida. And so, we waited.

In our refugee transport, with the exception of a very few, most men and women were young. This was, of course, due to the natural fact that middle aged and older people found it even more difficult than the younger ones to literally walk out and abandon their homes and become refugees with a place. The other fact, which made a big impact on the exodus of many young men was the urgent call, through the still operating Warsaw radio station, from the mayor of Warsaw, when Warsaw was under siege—a call specifically directed to young men of military age—to leave, to get out and away from the path of the German invasion before the Germans came and forced them into their service.

So, many young men left—some with their wives or sweethearts, some in small groups of friends, some, at a later stage, by themselves—almost all on foot, some on bicycles. Many left, but still too few. By every single one—man, woman, child—young, middle aged, old—too few.

Some of these who did leave, mostly those who left behind children, wives, parents, close family—decided to return home before it was still at all possible—

before the new borders were sealed too tightly to even attempt to cross them. Too many returned—by every single one tragically too many.

The day of our arrival in the Soviet forced labor camp and the first day of work of our barrack's team in the forest were now well behind us. The certain measure of leniency and consideration during these two initial days was also gone. All barrack teams of our newly arrived transport were broken up. With the exception of three elderly men, all other men were young and were put in teams for the hardest and most dangerous work in camp—felling of the biggest trees, carrying or pulling out the logs stacked on sleds to a roadside.

The women, except for four (one elderly, two mothers of small children and one, an expecting mother) were assigned to many various teams and various work on the patches of the forest, where the men had cut down the biggest trees and removed the logs they had cut off them. A lot still remained to be done in these parts of the forest: felling of all remaining trees, sawing off the logs, carrying them to the roadside—saving the larger branches, left over by the men's teams, into smaller pieces, gathering of all branches into separate bunches (Kieseiory) for burning; removing with saws and axes the remaining lower parts of the tree trunks, the stumps, the deep and stubborn tree roots from the grounds—gathering these remains also into bunches. Burning of all bunches. All these tasks were classified as "light work" and were "women's jobs."

There was a six day work week—Monday through Saturday—each day—at least eight hours of work and two hours of walking. We were paid weekly for the work. With this money we were able to buy the food, which was available to us in the camp—bread, a bowl of soup in the morning (usually watery cabbage leaves' soup or fish soup (treske)—another bowl of soup and a square of a solid concoction of the came cabbage leaves in the evening for dinner-supper. Plain, hot boiled water (Kipiatok) was our beverage.

Enduring. To endure.

In a natural, healthy reaction to this extremely harsh and cruel reality, each of us seemed to have made a resolve. Most often an unspoken, or even an unformed and not quite conscious resolve—to try very hard, to actively overcome, to take measures in order to endure.

Individual strong self-discipline, structured, firm, daily routine. An utmost effort to adhere to it—and to carry the burdens of everyday as much as possible by oneself—without heavily leaning on and overburdening anybody willing to help.

In each family unit, not contradictory at all with self-reliance—mutual help, care and emotional support.

In each barrack community—genuine good will, warmth, readiness to help when possible. This, however, was paired with the acceptance of and respect for the fact that each family tended to share their occasionally acquired extra bits of food within the family unit only.

All these conditions, and many others, were essential contributing factors to the effort, to the ability, to the possibility for enduring—and with it—to a chance of survival.

And so, we would get up in the morning with the six o'clock gong. [(Our white enamel washbowl continued to be invaluable—in the mornings, in the evenings, at the weekly "banias" (common baths), and even for small laundry washings)]. We would all sit down, unhurriedly, on the benches at the cleaned up wooden table, exchange our "good mornings," our anxious glances, and eat neatly our breakfast—the soup, bought after waiting in a long line—bread and hot water.

Evenings, after as far as it was possible, washing and scrubbing off the grime of the forest off ourselves, we would, neatly dressed, gather again at the

table for our evening "meal." Unbelievably relaxed now, in the warm security of this barrack—of its people, of the family. A quiet, warm, renewing night was ahead of us. An oblivion for the night—within the barrack with its protective walls, which were blocking off the desolation around from us.

And then, there were these Saturday evenings, the end of the work-week. These evenings, each of us in one's own little space—and everybody together in the common parts of the barrack, would do an energetic, thorough and deep cleanup. There was carrying of many pails of water from the little stream, heating the water in a huge iron kettle hanging over a fire outside, or in every available pot on the stove inside the barrack. There was sweeping and then scrubbing with bricks or rough stones of all surfaces in the barrack—table, benches, shelves, floor.

With the work done, we would then linger a little around the table and talk and ponder, relax a little, enjoy the neatness in the barrack—worry. Then came Sunday with no six o'clock gong. Sundays—for washing clothes, the few towels, and the few pieces of linen of our beds—mending, darning—and even nail and cuticle trimming. All these seemingly little acts were of great importance and of great consequence.

In addition to being sanitary and therefore, in the long run, becoming a prophylactic factor—this kind of behavior was probably very effective in preserving our humanity. Without this strong feeling we would not be able to endure and to survive.

Most important, however, was to hope—to continue to hope that this present, cruel reality must and will end some day. That some day, somehow, this nightmare will come to an end—that we will all be free again, sound and well, and back in our homes in a free Poland—back again among all of our relatives, friends,

neighbors, acquaintances, former teachers and classmates, storekeepers, shoemakers and tailors—all of our old world—and almost all now west of the border under German occupation—but some day, all together free again in Mezritch, in Warsaw, everywhere.

A dream?

A fervent hope?

This state of mind was the propeller of all our efforts to endure.

We tried to be hopeful. Still, sometimes or often, we wavered, and despaired. But not for long. The family, the community, their warmth and determination, were repeatedly chasing away the doubts, the black thoughts of irreversibility—and in place of it, they would infuse the despairing with strength and renewed hope.

CHAPTER XII

We wrote to Rachela, Daddy's sister in Brzese. We wrote to Celinka; she and her husband Adek Oferman chose the option of accepting a Soviet passport. They were allowed to remain in Lwow, where they have gone to from Brzesc. We did not know if our letters reached either of them. We did not receive any answers.

We still did not know Baba and Zeida's address. Once in a while, an outside Soviet official, probably just in order to comply with the letter of the law, would come to our camp for a kind of inspection. Sometimes, he would stop in our barrack at evening and ask us how we are; we would not dare to complain. We were afraid of possible rather "unpleasant" consequences. So, instead, we would say in unison "chorosho" (fine). Always, however, after this, Mrs. "Berger," (whose real name I can't recall now, the woman who was arrested and transported here with her little son Lolus while her husband was not with them at the moment) and I would step out with absolute determination in front of our barrack group and tell our stories—she about her husband—I about Zeida and Baba—and pleaded that we be reunited with them.

Our torturous existence continued. Worry, anxiety and fear about Baba and Zeida, about ourselves, about all the others across the demarcation line. Along with it were the physical aspects: the unbearably hard work under unbearable working and living conditions; extreme malnourishment and the ever present gnawing feeling of hunger. To add to these severe troubles, unexpected by us, newcomers—a plague befell us. Out of the marshes of the forests, the usual, late summer swarms of mosquitoes came upon us all. The mosquitoes brought

malaria. Daddy had a bout of it, with bad chills, followed by high fever. Very luckily, it was a short-lasting attack.

Strangely, after the mosquito season, I came down with some unexplained, malaria-like symptoms—chills and fever, which plagued me for a period of time every day, but only after the work-hours—through the evening and a part of the night. At the time Daddy worked on the night shift, in the hardest team in the camp. He still somehow managed to stand in line, to get and to eat the "dinner" with me. But then, uneasily, he had to leave. In the morning, the shakes and fever would subside, and therefore, in the absence of any obvious symptoms of an illness right now, directly before the start of the work day, in accordance with the rules, the nurse couldn't give me a note allowing me to stay in the barrack. She would pronounce me fit to march off to the forest for work.

Yes, there was a nurse in our labor camp. A young Russian woman, Marusia, most probably a former prisoner, but still banished to this forsaken area. Or, maybe, voluntarily here, in order to be close to a very dear prisoner-relative. She seemed to be understanding and compassionate. Forced to comply with camp regulations, having very limited medical supplies and qualifications of a nurse only, still, when possible, she seemed to be trying to do her best. She was treating her "patients," when she could and knew how or thought so—she was issuing them "excuse-from-work" notes even when barely permissible. Only for the most severely ill, ordered to strictly follow proper camp regulations, she was allowed to issue a pass, to be confirmed by the camp commandant; a pass to a very small and primitive regional hospital in a village about seven miles away from our camp.

Now, the longer we were here, it was becoming increasingly clear. The right spirit and attitude; hope—friendship, mutual support and help—even though

essential, but, if alone, will not suffice for a prolonged time, in our battle for survival. Many of us, without enough physical strength and body resistance, may be overcome by illness, of which some were a direct result of malnutrition. We all needed badly to do something about it. The possibilities of obtaining more and better food to supplement our camp diet were almost nonexistent. Almost.

Not far from the wooden structure where food was prepared and distributed to camp prisoners, but quite farther from the cluster of our barracks, one could unexpectedly come upon a neat row of small but pleasant looking, country-like wooden huts—each surrounded by a tiny lot and fence. Here lived, some with their families, officials and other members of the camp administration—overseers, clerks and other camp employees;—some local Komi citizens—among them the camp commandant with his wife and their six children, the vice commandant; and many others in lower positions, not Komis, former citizens of various distant Soviet Republics. Most of the latter ones had been prisoners, taken here during the infamous purges of the early thirties. Now, finally lucky enough to be taken off the rolls of the hard-labor slaves, they were entrusted with various chores and duties; but still were not allowed to return to free life in their own Republics and remained confined to this banishment in Komi. All in these separate little huts, as though in a separate comfortable looking village, were probably, we judged, quite well provided for now. Our thoughts, therefore, targeted on them as the only possible source of some kind of accommodation. We did not, however, expect them to help us out of compassion, or, maybe in some cases, of compassion alone.

The first to start some contact with the women of this little, separate "community" were a few women of our "community" in the barracks, specifically, the mothers of small children. They clearly realized the pressing need for

additional and better nutrition for their children and considered themselves responsible for somehow getting it for them—a seemingly impossible task.

These mothers, though not officially declared as excused from the camp slave work, were not called to work; therefore, during the day, they had the opportunity to look around for possibilities. They soon found out that in the nearby separate little "community" most of the women stayed in their little huts during the day. They were not forced now to do any work for the camp. They were allowed to be simply housewives and mothers only.

Soon the bartering was started. Our women were pulling out, piece by piece, their very few items of clothing, which they have hurriedly grabbed, when, trying to escape from the Germans, they were leaving their houses with their families. And then they dragged the bundles with themselves from place to place. Now, regretfully, but also gladly, they were trying to exchange them for any kind of food the other women would offer: a few potatoes, a jar of some dark, coarse flour.

In our barracks, Mrs. Barnia, the woman with five small children, desperately searched around and succeeded. In result, her little, two-and-a half year old cherub stopped his nightly crying for a "kichele." His mother managed to satisfy his hunger and craving with a few dark, coarse, sugarless imitations—only by their round shape resembling the real cookies from far away home. Mrs. Barnia must have been also doing some bartering for her two sisters and a cousin in our barracks.

Once, on a quiet Sunday, our day off, when, after eating the usual camp soup with Daddy and a few other people of our barracks at our communal table, I went back to our little area, I saw Mrs. Barnia's sister, Hinda, with her husband Chaim, eating their soup sitting on their beds next to ours. They were sitting so close to me, that I couldn't help but notice a few fat, dark noodles floating in their

soup bowls. I was not envious or in any way resentful. I certainly wished Hinda and Chaim, our good friends and the finest people around, to enjoy it. But, those ugly noodles looked so delicious. I walked out of the barracks to squelch the pain in my stomach, and also to free them from feeling uncomfortable, which I am sure they did.

Lolus' mother, Mrs. "Berger," was running out of the little money she brought with her from Bvzesc. There was not enough left for much longer to even buy the food from the camp eatery. She was compelled, therefore, to actually ask for some work—close to the barracks, so she could still drop in to check on Lolus. The few other non-working women in our barracks offered and promised to take good care of him in her absence. She was given the "job" of the cleaning woman in the little country-like huts. She got to know some of the women for whom she carried pails of water from the stream at the end of the camp and whose floors she scrubbed.

Mrs. "Berger" (not her real name; I feel rather guilty not remembering it) did not miss her opportunity. She, too, did a little bartering with them: the best pieces of her clothes in exchange for some very little extra food. And then, there was in our barracks Mrs. Mania Bojmelgrin, the expectant mother.

A dressmaker and seamstress, before the war she had her own small workshop in her hometown Zwolyn in Poland. Now, she was trying to spread the word about her trade. She succeeded in getting a customer from time to time, and for her sewing, some meager scraps of food for herself (and the growing baby she was carrying)—and also for the members of her immediate and extended family: her husband, her father and mother-in-law, her sister-in-law; and for the teenage girl Dwojrete, Mania's helper since back home, who was caught together with Mania and her family into the whirl of the war.

From our wicker trunk I got out my newest outfit, made just before the war. A black wool pleated skirt and a white angora pullover, which our friend and neighbor, Fania Edelbaum, embroidered with a colorful design. I tried to convince Daddy that it would be more sensible and easier to barter these two pieces than any of Daddy's good suits, which he suggested to barter; that this outfit will be very tempting to the wives of the officials here.

On one Sunday, though reluctantly, Daddy did take it and, after a while, came back with a pailful of potatoes. Four, exactly four and never more little precious potatoes I peeled after work every evening. I peeled them carefully, so as not to waste even the smallest sliver—boiled them, cut them into small pieces and put them into our supper soup. To our present appreciative sense of taste the potato enriched soup felt delicious, and was satisfying.

Finally, the first communication from outside has reached us; from Rachela in Brzesc. But it was not a letter and not the so anxiously awaited for information about Baba and Zeida. It was a food package, sent through the Red Cross; rendered fat and baked or dried farfel (little square noodles), which Rachela had prepared excellently and thoughtfully. These two items we used as very special supplements to our soups. We tried to stretch them and make them last long. They were so perfectly done that they preserved unspoiled for a few months.

We were grateful to Rachela for her concern and her effort. The lack of any letter from her told us about the fear among the people in Brzesc; we understood it.

The summer has come to a definite end. Rosh-Hashana came and went. The skies were lead-gray. Then came Yom-Kipur Eve. Some of us were sitting around the table. Others stayed in their corners. It was very quiet. There was

hardly a word uttered. There was sadness in our souls and in the air. There were memories, images. The door opened. The camp vice-commandant walked in, looked around and into every nook. Then he read the list of people and their work assignments for the next day, the day of Yom-Kipur. This list was not the usual one. Except for Mrs. Barnia, the mother of five small children, this work list, for the first time, included everybody in the barrack.

On the morning of Yom-Kipur, Daddy and some other men in our barrack, who always were doing the hardest work in the forest, were ordered to walk off to their usual assignments. All remaining people in the barrack, except for Mrs. Barnia, gathered together in a group as told. We were led off, single file, through an improvised, very narrow, flimsy "bridge" across the stream at the end of the camp. There we saw a large area freshly cleared of what not long ago had been a virgin forest. This area was now covered by barracks in process of being built. Obviously, our camp will be enlarged and additional workers were expected here.

A cold rain fell. Our work for the day was to mix cement, and, with ropes, to pull bucketsful of it to the roofs of one of the unfinished barracks. We were divided into two groups and kept interchanging—one on the ground, the other on the roof. The rain was falling on the cement, on us and on some tears. We were drained by the rain and smeared with cement.

The old, frail, gentle and pious Mr. Bojmelgrin was very quiet—visibly deeply sad and suffering, because, by working today he felt that he was violating the holiness of Yom-Kipur. The equally old and frail and pious Mrs. Bojmelgrin was murmuring—at times angrily—in a whisper; praying or cursing—or both.

CHAPTER XIII

The letter arrived. We received the first letter from Baba and Zeida. They are in Komi, in the middle of the forests, in a labor camp. Both were assigned to work in the forest. Both, so far, work together in the same teams. They are very concerned about us. They, too, of course, had to work as on any other days, on Rosh-Hashana and on Yom-Kipur. However, Zeida wrote, evenings on these holidays, he and others in his barrack managed to gather quietly, and as unconspicously as possible, around the barrack's table and pray, and intone.

Daddy read this letter at our barrack table, to our people in the barrack and to others from the surrounding barracks, and we all were amazed that even such a little holiday service was possible to have in a camp. At the time, we did not know the whole truth. Zeida did not write us everything about it. He didn't want to worry us. The fact is, as we later learned, that somehow the camp authorities noticed or found out about it, and shortly afterward, the camp commandant called in Zeida for questioning and threatening warnings. Understandably, when this was going on, Baba was desperate. It was immensely lucky that it ended with the warnings only.

They, too, keep pleading, Zeida wrote, to be reunited with us, but were not promised anything. Still, they were hoping. They received a package from Celinka and her husband Adek Oferman, from Lwow. Of course, they appreciated the package very much. Irka and her second husband Olek Marszalkowicz were transported to Archangelsk, to a labor camp. Luckily, Olek was assigned to work as a medic, and Irka was left to stay in without any work duties. Celinka, of course, was sending packages to them also.

Sometime later, we too received a package from Celinka, with warm sweaters and other everyday "luxuries." Among them, a small cake of shaving soap for Daddy. I still have and keep the container of this soap.

Winter was coming, for sure, very soon. Though there was no snow as yet, the raw, cold air, the dark skies were making us expect a very big snowfall any time now.

By now, the camp management has probably already appraised us all—our qualities and potential as their work force; and, therefore, sorted us out and assigned us to our work places accordingly. So we thought, and expected to continue to work with the same team, at least for the time being. It was comforting to work daily in a group of people one is getting to know better and feel closer to with each difficult day. But suddenly one morning I was sent to a different team, different work assignment. Here I was, in an all Ukrainian team, among tough, hardened, clearly unfriendly, and maybe even outright hostile and hating young, strong peasants, mostly men and a few women.

The grounds looked as though the trees have just been cut down. The logs, barely cleared of their branches, were spread all over haphazardly, crisscrossed and on top of one another, tangled with the branches and with a mass of the usual forest brush. My task was to get these freshly cut down, damp, huge and thick, very heavy logs untangled, out from under each other, and then lift them and put them on a long, sled-like wagon, fill the wagon up, tie iron chains securely and tightly around the logs and on the wagon, and lead the horse harnessed to the wagon to the edge of the forest for unloading.

Here I was with reins in my hands. The day was long, tortuous, with no help, not even one friendly word, gesture or look, only side glances of curiosity, of

misdirected anger and hatred. I was making the utmost physical effort and straining myself to the breaking point in lifting out of the tangles and onto the sled the enormously heavy logs, one end, then the other end. In this part of the task I had to depend on my own strength and my own effort only. But I also had to keep going from location to location, wherever the logs were, and then to points near the road for unloading of the same logs. And at these tasks, in the process of moving with the horse and wagon, I was most desperate.

To achieve anything I had to get the cooperation of the horse; I would have to know how to signal my "intentions" to him, how to lead him, how to maneuver him out of the tangles on the ground, while his and my feet and ankles were getting caught in them and were repeatedly sinking into the cracks between the various branches. It was a very long day, but still only the early afternoon. I was desperate. Still, the horse and I were lucky to have all our bones unbroken in one piece and the joints working. The day was very long, with many more hours to go.

A man, leading a horse, came over to me quietly. He took the reins out of my hands, released my horse from the harness, motioned to me to follow him. This man beside me, in a smart, gray, sport suit and a matching cap, with manners and the air of a country-gentleman-aristocrat about him, a Russian, only a few years ago a slave-laborer himself, still not free, confined to this camp in Komi, was now the caretaker of the camp horses and the overseer of the labor force in the stables. We could often see him and his teenage, slightly built son, dressed also impeccably, trotting through the camp on sprite and well-taken care of horses. This man, obviously, was on his daily rounds to all spots in the forest, where the camp work-horses were, checking on their condition as one of his duties. Finding one of these horses exhausted, he decided to free him from his

slave work for the remaining part of the day, and I happened to be rescued, too, just incidentally, in consequence of the horse's rescue.

Realizing fully this situation and the circumstances, I still felt with certainty that this caretaker of horses was sincerely glad for the opportunity to help a human being, too. And I thanked him with a low (but full with deeply felt gratitude) "spasibo"—thank you. And so, the cruel day ended softly and humanly. (I could even talk about it now with a pinch of self-directed humor).

After this try with me on the "wozka" ended in a fiasco, they never sent me to this work again. They probably, though, were in a hurry to get out the logs from the forest before the snow fell and made the work with the horses there extremely treacherous. Maybe, therefore, they were sending as many people they could get to this work now.

So, the next morning, they tried a different experiment, a very different approach. They sent Sara Bojmelgrin from our barrack, instead of to the very unfriendly team I had been sent to the day before, to a very friendly team, the team of young men and a few women from our and other barracks, all Jews, brought here in our transport from Brest. After work that day, Daddy, who was in this team too, told me that, naturally, everybody was helping Sara at every step, and that the overseer did not object to this at all, or maybe pretended not to see it. Daddy said that, without this complete help, Sara's day on "wozka" would be as miserable as mine had been the day before. They didn't send Sara to this work any more, either.

However, two of our young women not only managed to handle the job of "wozka" well, but they excelled in it. They were so productive that they even exceeded the required production norms. They became two women—

"Stackanotchyks." They were the camp's stars. One of them was in our barrack. Our next bed "neighbors," Hinda Chag's cousin, Rifka was a petite, tiny, seventeen year old girl. Very recently she married the equally young Lejbl, Zeida's choir boy, who used to come to our house for rehearsals, evenings, after putting in full workdays in a little brush factory. Rifka's family owned a horse and buggy. For them, this was not a possession of luxury to be used for leisure and enjoyment, this was a tool and means with which Rifka's father labored, transporting various things, to squeeze out a meager living for his family. And Rifka, occasionally helping her father, learned a lot about work horses and their proper handling. And how useful this was to her now.

The other of our two women great achievers was from another barrack. She did not have the previous "experience" in working with horses. She was an athletically looking, seemingly strong, young woman, and, somehow, she succeeded with an almost inborn, natural easiness. Both were always sent to one of the Jewish teams, sometimes even to the teams where their husbands worked.

I continued to work in the all women teams. I learned that the work tools should be kept in good condition. A sharp ax and a sharp saw on strong and firm handles are our friends and help a lot in our enormous effort and extremely hard work of clearing the forest.

The winter came. We received two precious postcards through the Red Cross from across the river Bug, from the other side of the demarcation line; from the part of Poland invaded, occupied and now under the full control of the Nazis. One postcard was from Mezritch, from my gymnasium classmate and friend, Sulamita (Sula) Weiner. Only a few words, mainly with concern about us. She wrote, very briefly, about herself, that she and another of our classmates and

friends, Sara Gliksberg, are now operating a nursery-kindergarten. We were so grateful to Sula for writing to us.

The second postcard was from Warszawa (Warsaw) an even shorter one. It said: "Bondcie nam zdrowi," which means: may you be literally: well and whole, sound, well and in one piece, signed by our youngest close relative in Warsaw, the 13 year old son of Zeida's brother Mojsze, Henius, my first cousin, whose Bar-Mitzva dinner party I have attended in Warsaw this last summer of 1939, just before the war.

The were no more postcards from Sula and Henius from across the river Bug. It was winter, late 1940.

CHAPTER XIV

Life kept going on, and its natural process continued. In our barrack, Mania Bojmelgrin, the seamstress, was already a few months pregnant in time of her arrest in Brest. Her pregnancy kept developing normally. And now, on one winter day late in 1940, as expected, the birth came. The camp nurse stood up bravely to the task and delivered successfully a fine baby girl. Mother and child stayed for a few days in the nurses' quarters and were doing well. Mr. Bojmelgrin Sr., prepared for generous bartering, set out into nearby huts in search of a small crib. He came back to the barrack beaming; he carried a small, strong, wooden "Koryto," some kind of a trough, in which peasant women usually wash laundry or use it as a container from which to feed their small animals. The old Mr. Bojmelgrin also had a strong, long rope, strong, dependable hooks and a hand-held drill. With a great effort and a lot of advice from people all around him in the barrack the "Koryto" was soon hanging on the ceiling's log beams, down to the level of the new parent's bed, within the close reach of Mania's hand. Then, one evening, when, after the day's work in the forest, we walked into our barrack, there were the mother and the daughter.

The baby looked and most certainly actually was totally comfortable in the "Koryto," the grandfather's loving gift, and in the warm softness of her little shirts, blankets and bedding, all prepared by the always resourceful, ingenious and industrious Mania, the mother, the seamstress. With hushed awe, in tender joy and also with sadness and worry we looked at this baby, who, unaware of the dangers of the times and place looked so utterly confident and happy.

The baby was named Hania. Hania's birth was followed by another very happy event in our barrack. A small family arrested in different places, transported in different cattle trains to different labor camps, torn apart, was

finally reunited. On a Sunday, our day off, when we all were in the barrack, the door opened. A strange man carrying some bundles walked in. And instantly we saw Mrs. Berger and little Lolo leaping from their places and embracing this man excitably and so lovingly. This was, of course, Mr. Berger. And we all basked in their happiness with unreserved joy, only mine was marred by Baba's and Zeida's absence.

CHAPTER XV

Now, with the winter set in, the seasonal mosquitoes and malaria gone, a different kind of illness, of a different cause, and not a seasonal one, started to beset the people of our transport: abscesses, which I saw for the first time right after we arrived here this early summer, while bathing in the "bania." I saw them there on the Ukrainian women, who were here already a few months. The same kind of abscesses caught up now with some people in our group. The continuous malnutrition was taking its toll. More and more of us were covered with abscesses, single ones or more, varied in their severity.

Daddy was stricken, too. The abscess he had, right in the middle of his lower back, was especially severe and serious; deep and the size of a fist, very painful. The camp nurse cleaned the abscess, put on a dressing, gave Daddy an excuse from work note and hurried off to attend to others. She left bandages, etc. for me to keep changing the dressings. Hinda Chag, our next bed neighbor and good friend, the natural nurse, who helped her sister to take care of her five children, soon pushed me aside and took over in taking care of Daddy's wound. It was a deep, large, infected wound, almost eating at the bones. Luckily, very luckily, no complications have developed, and after some time, slowly, very slowly, it started to heal. And then, back to the team and the forest.

The winter must have been at its peak. The winds with the ferocity of an Arctic blizzard, combined with temperatures in the fifties below zero (Celsius), persisted. A rumor circulated that there is a rule, a written rule for labor camps, a rule specifying that, when the temperature drops to 52° below zero, the workers should be released from their work in forest and allowed to march to their barracks.

Clearly, the men in charge, the overseers, were slow in following this rule, probably for reasons of their own, maybe out of fear to take this responsibility and to have to face their own bosses. Once, Daddy, and his teammates, while on their usual night-shift in the forest, experienced the most bitter and dangerous winter conditions. And still, for a long time, their overseer did not allow them to leave. Finally, however, he gave in to the loud demands of this team, the best in the camp. By this time, the cold and the wind were so severe and ferocious, that the men had to keep running all the way to the barracks.

The overseer released them too late. Daddy got frostbite on his nose. I found a dirty piece of a sack somewhere on the ground and I washed it. I had a package of sanitary cotton, which as a result of malnutrition and hard work, I stopped needing for some time. Daddy took the piece of sack, the cotton and made a soft, little cover for his nose and a pair of very warm gloves for me.

I, too, rebelled, in a risky and dangerous defiance; badly dressed, feeling very cold, I left my team in the forest and walked off to our barrack. Too late. My feet were frostbitten.

This happened on a day when an official, an inspector, visited the camp, the barracks and some of the teams, including the one I worked in that day. Maybe the presence of an inspector spared me from punishment from my unusual defiance, which, actually, was just a desperate act in reaction to the penetrating cold I felt.

The nurse treated my frostbite and next morning allowed me to stay in the barrack. A little later that day I was told to go to the commandant's office. The commandant was very angry. Screaming, he kept asking me two rather rhetorical questions: 1) wasn't it enough trouble to bring workers here all the way from Poland? and 2) do I maybe want him to bring workers all the way from America?

Then, suddenly, he quieted down and told me I should wear a "babushka" on my head in this cold weather.

Very puzzling. Was this last remark made by the angry commandant or by the father of his six children?

Disobedience was very rare. We were in the grip of the labor camp whirl. To survive, we had to go with the whirl—its demands, its speed and its intensity.

The kerosene lamp was out for the night. It was very quiet. But there were some signs around; of relief after a cruel day, and other signs. The air seemed to be thick and heavy with unhappiness and anxiety. I whispered to Daddy: my heart is heavy. Daddy whispered to me: on the days when I am allowed to stay in the barrack his load feels so much smaller, his hard work so much easier, and the day is almost good. I was falling asleep; the heaviness gone, my heart felt light. I felt safe, and warm, and hopeful, and so thankful. The year was 1940, and I was 22.